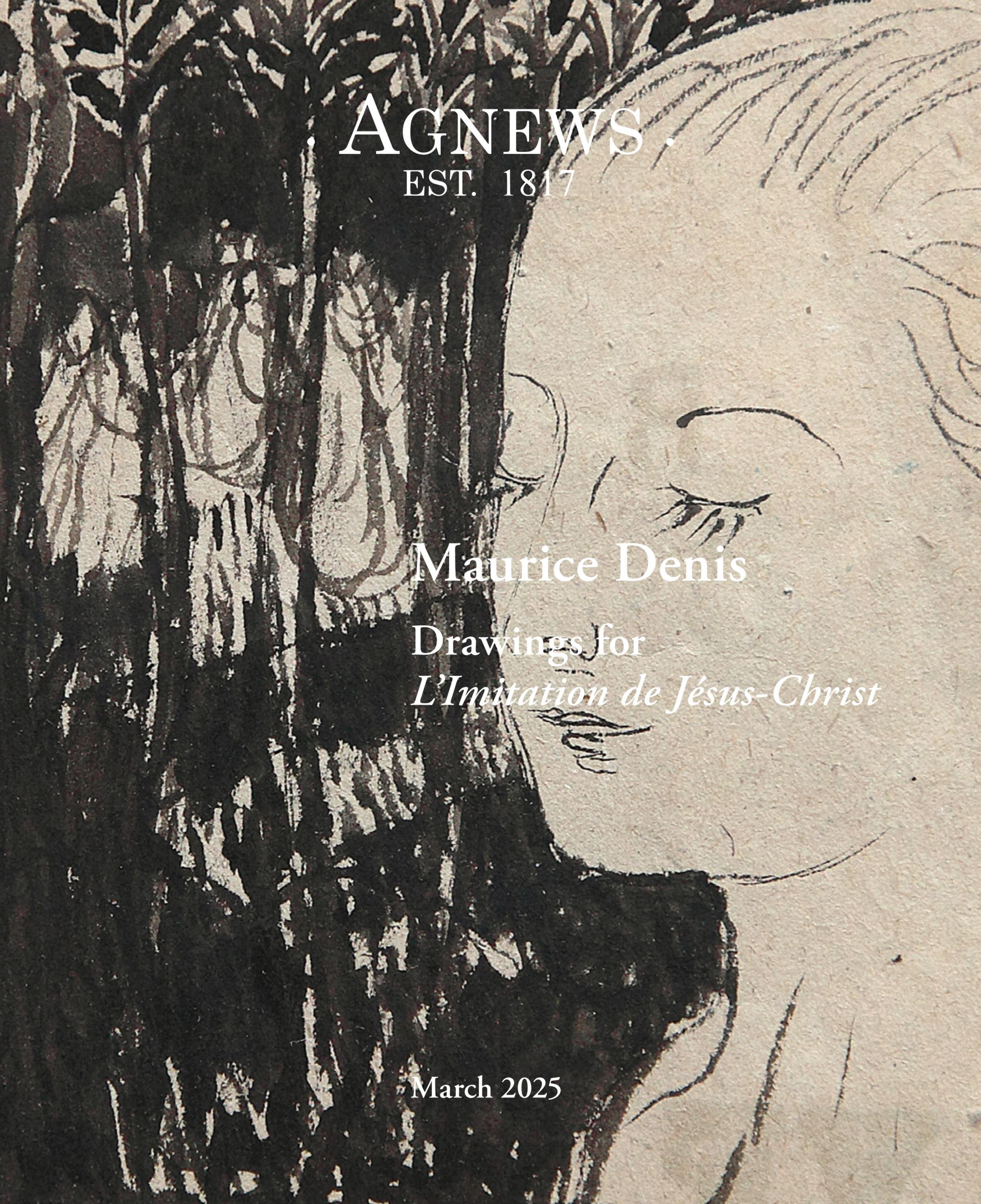




• AGNEWS •
EST. 1817

Maurice Denis

Drawings for

L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ

March 2025

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As dealers, historians and art lovers, we know how rare a treat it is to be able to experience and contemplate a large group of preparatory drawings for the same undertaking – to find ourselves at the genesis of its creation and to feel its profound coherence. Yet here we find ourselves amidst the exceptional collection of 44 black and white drawings by Maurice Denis made for his great, early illustration project, *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ*. Denis began thinking about this project in the early 1890s, worked on it throughout that decade, and finally published it with Ambroise Vollard in 1903. This illustration, synthesizing image and text, offered the young artist, then already one of the leaders of the Nabis, an opportunity that was equal to his ambition, linking his aesthetic beliefs to his religious faith and convictions. This would be a chance for Denis to translate his spirituality in an immediate, trailblazing graphic language, at the vanguard of modernist experimentation. Using ink, black chalk, and crayon Conté, Denis produced a superb body of work. Reviewing it, we can truly witness the extent of this artist's profound commitment to both his craft and his ideals.

The historian Clémence Gaboriau has produced a remarkable, in-depth piece of research that allows us to see this work in full illumination. We thank her for her contribution to our knowledge of Maurice Denis.

Above all, we would like to thank Claire Denis and Fabienne Stahl for their confidence and support in finding a new home for this ensemble. Claire and Fabienne have been working for many years on the catalogue raisonné of Denis's work, and this body of drawings would never have seen the light of day without their precise classification efforts and extensive research. They have an undeniable and unmatched understanding of this work. It has been a pleasure to hear them talk about each drawing, in all its artistic dimension. Thank you.

Eric Gillis



L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ **Illustrations by Maurice Denis**

Clémence Gaboriau

Recognized as one of the most influential artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the multi-talented Maurice Denis (1870-1943) did important work in painting, decoration, theory and illustration.

In the 1890s, Denis, then a young artist hoping to achieve his creative freedom, set out to define a more modern kind of painting and illustration. Gradually abandoning the realist outlook in art, he began to call for a subjective relationship between the artist's perception and his depictions. In illustration, likewise, he called for a greater artistic autonomy in interpreting texts. From a young age he showed a strong interest in books, especially religious ones, and his early illustrations underscore the great harmony between his artistic practice and his faith, of which *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* is one of the most important demonstrations.

An essential reading for the young Christian artist

Denis had the idea of illustrating *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* very early on. This devotional set of precepts was written to help believers follow Jesus Christ on the path of interior life. After the Bible, it has been one of the most widely distributed and read works in the world since the end of the Middle Ages. The text's author is officially anonymous, though scholars have often attributed it to the Dutch monk Thomas à Kempis. It comprises four parts:

Book 1, "Admonitions Profitable for The Spiritual Life", including 25 chapters

Book 2, "Admonitions Concerning the Inner Life", with 12 chapters

Book 3, "On Inward Consolation", with 59 chapters

Book 4, "Of the Sacrament of the Altar", with 18 chapters.

Each section can be read on its own. More than a treatise, the collection resembles an ascetic manual, intended to support the reader throughout life, exhorting him to recollect, give penance and interiorise his faith.

The young Maurice Denis had been guided by the recommendations contained in this book, which he had read at least in September 1885,¹ and which was crucial to his growth as a Christian artist. Although he did not directly produce any images related to *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* at that time, the text had a special resonance; as he saw it as a call to meditation and fervour, and as a model of piety. The decision to illustrate the book was a natural choice.

Denis as theorist: towards a new conception of illustration

As a young artist, the question of how to decorate texts interested Denis. When, in 1890, he and his fellow Nabis worked to promote new conceptions of art, Denis also reconsidered the role of illustration. His “Definition of neo-traditionnism,” published in *Art et Critique* in August 1890, introduced the now-famous quotation: “Remember that a painting – before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or an anecdote of some sort – is essentially a flat surface covered with colours, put together in a certain order”² and this soon became the manifesto of the Nabi artists. Reacting against realism, the Nabis defended painting as a subjective enterprise, in which abstract and symbolic rather than imitative colours and forms manifested an artist’s inner vision, which had the power to arouse an emotion in the viewer. In their quest for a new art, free from naturalism, they forged a new pictorial path. This quest for a modernity that differed from that taught at the Beaux-Arts, already apparent in the works of Gauguin and Émile Bernard, led these artists to simplify their forms, painting their pictures in flat planes of solid, vibrant colour, while doing almost entirely away with linear perspective. The major ambition of these young artists was to rediscover more authentic sources for their art, free of cliché and convention. The Nabis also sought to break down the boundary between craft and art, trying out their experiments in every possible medium while creating objects that were both beautiful and useful.

Among them, Denis was perhaps one of those who most expressed his interest in breaking boundaries between the various arts. In his manifesto article, he not only spells out what painting should be, but also redefines illustration, embracing a whole range of media in his new line of thought. He explains:

“When plasticity fights closely with the written word, enormities appear in the book. I dream of old missals with their rhythmic frames, the sumptuous letters of the graduations, the first woodcuts, which, in short, correspond to our literary complexity by their preciousness and delicacy. But illustration is the decoration of a book! Instead of 1° the veneer of photographic black squares on white or on type; 2° naturalistic cut-outs, randomly placed in the text; 3° other cut-outs without any research, purely manual, sometimes (oh!) with a Japanese pretext.

This decoration is not bound to the text, there is no exact correspondence between the subject and the writing, but rather an embroidery of arabesques on the pages, an accompaniment of expressive lines.”³

More than a model to be followed, these theories were rather the result of the Nabis’ pictorial experiments, which Denis describes a year and a half after the group was formed. Here Denis argues that aesthetic ideas are communicable between various disciplines. Seeking an interdependence between decoration and text, he defined the text–image relationship as a network of correspondences. Hoping to free the image from the constraints of merely transposing the text into picture, which would create a redundant doubling of the narrative, he suggested to “decorate” the page via an idealized artistic synthesis, in which the artist could speak visually through expressive lines of abstract arabesques. The image should no longer be a shadow of the written word, but rather should come to amplify and accompany the text with its own, more metaphorical and subtle expression.

First publishing attempts and first drawings

As with his work on Verlaine’s *Sagesse*,⁴ illustrating *L’Imitation* was a project initiated by the painter himself. By the end of 1893, he was already working on his first compositions for the book.

To complete the project, Denis pulled from several motifs he created in previous works, such as a drawing dated 15 August 1888 (fig. 1), used for the image on page 220 (fig. 2), as well as earlier paintings. The motif for *La Montée au Calvaire* of 1889 appears on page 350 of the edition.⁵ Elsewhere we find Denis making independent but related paintings concurrently with his illustrations for *L’Imitation*; these can also be found in the book. Thus, he did this for *Les Colombes* on page 390 (fig. 3),⁶ and for *Vue d’Assise* on page 259.⁷ In these examples, the artist also always executed one or more drawings in graphite or ink beforehand, perhaps to better understand how they would look as black-and-white illustrations, and to adapt it to the format of the book (figs. 4, 5, 6, 7). Clearly for him, there was a great deal of interpenetration between the drawing – although it’s not clear whether it was part of the initial inspiration or whether it was done with the engraved image in mind –, the painting and then the illustration.

Denis’s work on *L’Imitation* was actively encouraged by his friends and artistic collaborators. As early as November 1894, most of the artist’s friends, who were also his first sponsors, wanted to take part in the project: the composer Ernest Chausson, the painter Henry Lerolle, the engineer and patron Arthur Fontaine and his wife Marie, the writer Gabriel Trarieux, the politician Adrien Mithouard, or even the critic and



fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 6



fig. 7

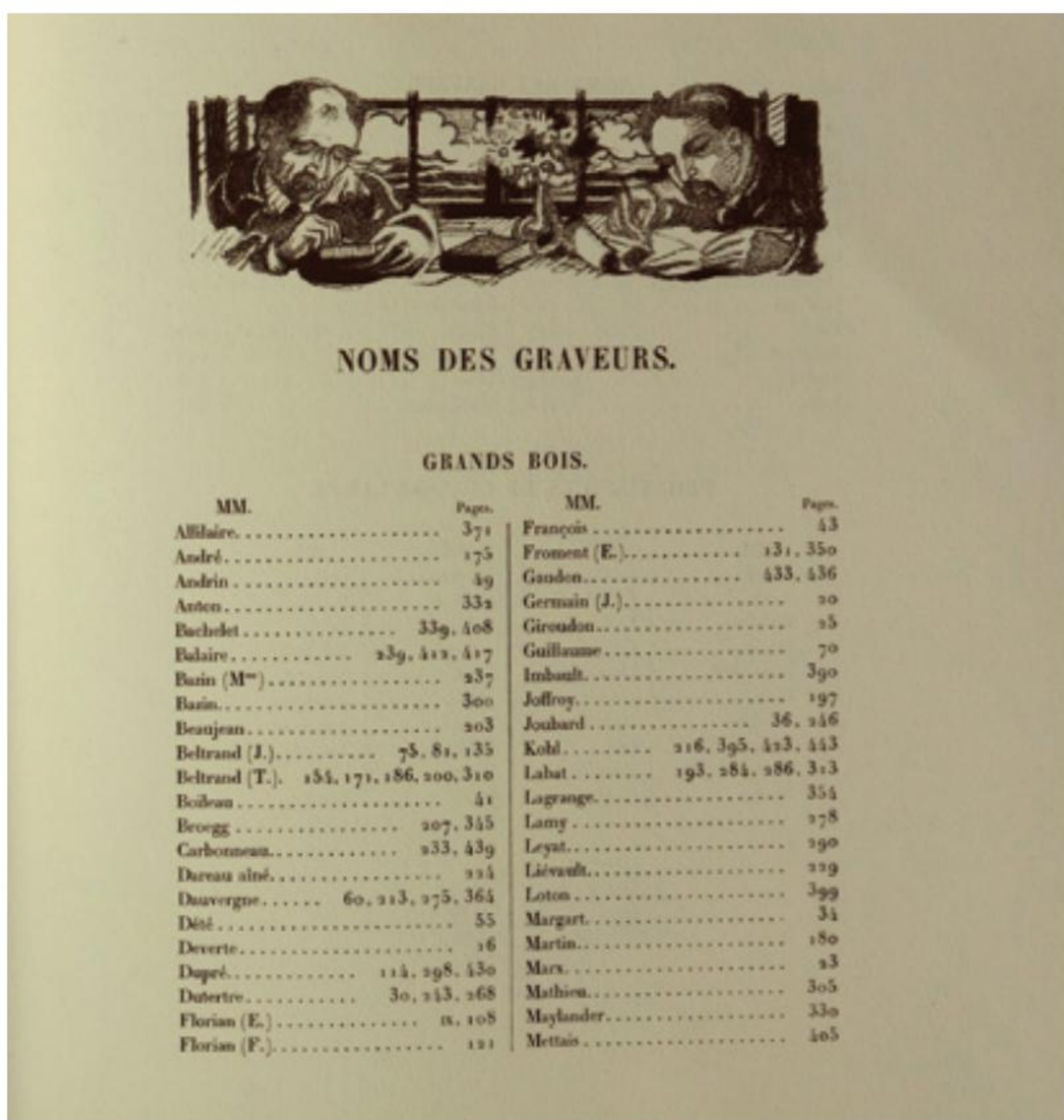


fig. 8

fig. 1: *Absolution*, 15 August 1888, charcoal/p., 24,5 x 28,8 cm, priv. coll. (© CRMD/Olivier Goulet)

fig. 2: *Of confession of our infirmity and of the miseries of this life*, illustration by Maurice Denis for *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* (third book, chapter XX), wood engraving by the Syndicat des graveurs sur bois, Paris, A. Vollard, 1903, p. 220. (© CRMD/Olivier Goulet)

fig. 3: *Les Colombes*, 1894, oil on canvas, 61 x 26 cm, Hays Collection (in the process of being donated to the musée d'Orsay, Paris, with usufruct reserved) (© CRMD/DR)

fig. 4: *That many good gifts are bestowed upon those who Communicate devoutly* (Fourth Book, chap. IV), study for *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ*, 1893-1899, Indian Ink/p, 10,5 x 11,5 cm, priv. coll. (© CRMD/Olivier Goulet)

fig. 5: *That many good gifts are bestowed upon those who Communicate devoutly* (Fourth Book, chap. IV), study for *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ*, 1893-1899, watercolour/p, 12 x 12,5 cm, priv. coll. (© CRMD/Olivier Goulet)

fig. 6: *That many good gifts are bestowed upon those who Communicate devoutly* (Fourth Book, chap. IV), study for *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ*, 1893-1899, mp/calque, 10,8 x 11,5 cm, priv. coll. (© CRMD/Olivier Goulet)

fig. 7: *That many good gifts are bestowed upon those who Communicate devoutly*, illustration by Maurice Denis for *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* (fourth book, chapter IV), wood engraving by the Syndicat des graveurs sur bois, Paris, A. Vollard, 1903, p. 390. (© CRMD/Olivier Goulet)

fig. 8: Ornamental band at the head of the engravers' table, illustration by Maurice Denis for *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ*, wood engraving by the Syndicat des graveurs sur bois, Paris, A. Vollard, 1903, p. 455. (© CRMD/Olivier Goulet)

defender of printmaking André Mellerio. All these figures began looking for a publisher on Denis's behalf.

At this point, though Denis was only at the early stage of iconographic research, he had already produced hundreds of sketches for the project. The great number of compositions listed in connection with *L'Imitation* – an exceptional group of which this catalogue presents – underlines the artist's enthusiasm for this work. Yet above all, it was his constantly renewed interest in the textual source, its call to religious meditation, that inspired him greatly. "[H]is evenings are all filled by the illustrations for *L'Imitation*".⁸ Denis would ultimately work on these drawings from 22 November 1893 to September 1899, as indicated by the annotation at the bottom of the illustration on page 443, corresponding to the last chapter of the edition.

Yet despite Denis's prodigious effort and his friends' search for a publisher, the project's status remained uncertain. Several publishers they reached out to were concerned about the difficulties of reproducing the artist's large number of images.⁹ Denis's friends attempted to promote the work with the pre-publication of a few compositions – first in the pages of the review *Le Spectateur catholique*,¹⁰ then in an article by André Mellerio devoted to new illustration in August 1897,¹¹ and above all in *L'Image*, where the latter devoted a laudatory article to Denis's initiative and reproduced six woodcuts.¹² Yet all these initiatives failed to produce the hoped-for publishing deal.

Meanwhile, Denis himself took other steps to advertise the project, in particular with the Corporation of Wood Engravers, which published *L'Image*. At the beginning of the summer of 1897, he wrote a letter to Tony Beltrand (the manager of the magazine, and artistic director alongside Auguste Lepère and Léon Ruffe) asking for his drawings to be transposed into woodcuts. Tony Beltrand then proposed that the Corporation could engrave Denis's compositions for *L'Imitation*, but the idea failed to gain momentum at that time.¹³

The long-awaited support: Ambroise Vollard, publisher

It was around the end of 1898 that the project finally came to fruition, thanks to the intervention of the merchant and recently publisher Ambroise Vollard, who Denis had apparently approached. This was an unusual project for Vollard, for a few reasons. The book's illustration in black and white was not to the typical taste of the publisher, whose attraction to colour was well known. A black-and-white book would be an outlier among Vollard's other project with Denis at the same time, the large colour prints of the 1899 *Amour* suite, as well as Vollard's other book projects in lithograph (Verlaine's *Parallèlement* by Bonnard, Mirbeau's *Jardin des Supplices* by Rodin, Longus' *Daphnis*

et Chloé by Bonnard). Yet in his memoirs, Vollard clearly explains the reasons that led him to publishing *L'Imitation*:

“Like *Parallèlement*, *Daphnis* was a mediocre success at the time: these two works were criticized in particular for being illustrated with lithographs; at that time, the only form of illustration that bibliophiles appreciated was wood engraving.

I said to myself, since bibliophiles only accept woodcuts, why shouldn't I give them woodcuts?

So I did, publishing an *Imitation of Christ*, for which Maurice Denis created the beautiful series we know today.”¹⁴

Critics and especially bibliophiles had complained that Vollard's previous works for not respecting the “rules” of traditional book publishing. Now Vollard, hoping for a more popular success, endeavoured to adhere strictly to the precept of the publisher Édouard Pelletan: “A book, it is black on white”.¹⁵ What's more, compared to the relatively obscure collections of poetry that he was publishing at the time, *L'Imitation* was a widely known book and accepted by all. Denis's edition of *L'Imitation* was thus the perfect opportunity for Vollard to both satisfy his bibliophile critics and garner a wider audience.

From drawing to print: the woodcut interpretations

Although Vollard was the official manager of the publication, it was Tony Beltrand who supervised all the engraving and printing with Denis, as the ornamental band at the head of the engravers' table in the book showing the two men at work reminds us (fig. 8). In particular, Beltrand organised the production of the work: he asked Denis to classify his drawings in a very precise order, as can be seen from the surviving preparatory sketches, which retain traces of the numbering of chapters or extracts from the text (see for example Cat. 18). This numbering allowed Beltrand to distribute the batches of drawings to different engravers, allowing for “a quality interpretation” and a more perfect and harmonious work.¹⁶ Ultimately, two series of drawings were made: the first are finished images designed for engraving, acquired by the bibliophile and patron Gabriel Thomas and now held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France;¹⁷ the second are the initial preparatory sheets that reveal the artist's hand, sensitivity, and process.

Nearly eighty engravers worked on the book as listed in the appendix. Each of the compositions produced in Beltrand's workshop is the result of a joint effort by these workers.¹⁸ Their transpositions of the drawings into wood were of great concern to Denis, who hoped to avoid discordant interpretations of his black-and-white illustrations, which had a lithograph-like appearance. Yet the engravers so skilfully and uniformly rendered the variety and subtlety of the artist's black shades that the results actually look like lithographs.

Though Beltrand hoped to complete the engravings in a single year, the project was delayed – understandably so, given the quantity of illustrations and the extreme care taken to respect Denis’s original drawings. The woodcuts were engraved between January 1900 and the end of 1902, while the text and images were printed by the Imprimerie Nationale from 1901. The two hundred and sixteen illustrations are all in black and white, becoming brighter throughout the book, visually conveying the reader’s gradual rapprochement with Christ. The one hundred and fourteen larger compositions follow the same format throughout: square and framed in black. At Denis’s request, they appear at the head of each chapter, recalling the layout of old books of piety. These are accompanied by headbands, fleurons and a large number of culs-de-lampe, designed when the large illustrations were engraved.

The book was not a critical success when it came out in January 1903, and it was even more of a commercial failure: bibliophiles still did not accept Vollard’s editions, and indeed refused to think of him as a legitimate publisher.¹⁹ One of the few words of praise came from Henry Cochin, Denis’s friend, who was eager to see the book published. The literary Cochin wrote to Denis that the work, which harmonized the latter’s admirable aesthetic with his Christian thought, was “a perfect joy”, and would be “a subject of meditation for many years.”²⁰

Graphic prints expressing a mystical symbolism

Illustration is one of the areas in which the continuity of Denis’s work is most apparent. The small format of *L’Imitation* illustrations and the book’s intimate setting invite the artist, and then the reader, to quiet contemplation. By conceiving his illustrations as evocations and meditative aids, Denis graphically uncovers the text’s spiritual content, expressing the invisible.

The selection of drawings presented here is an exceptional group, remarkable not only for their freshness and quality, but also for how they epitomise the artist’s religious vocation. These preparatory graphic compositions bear striking witness to Denis’s efforts to transpose an interior meditation onto the surface of a paper sheet.

L’Imitation de Jésus-Christ may not have found its audience in 1903, but today, historians of both art and literature find in it an exemplary demonstration of Denis’s mystical symbolism, delicately manifesting the “geography of an inner exploration.”²¹

Endnotes

1. 25 September 1885: "I am looking for something to read, something convenient to take with me, something interesting and moral? Well, I'll take *L'Imitation*." («Je cherche de quoi lire, de commode à emporter, d'intéressant et de moral? Eh bien, je prendrai *L'Imitation*.» in Maurice Denis, *Journal*, vol. I, 1884-1904, Paris, La Colombe, 1957, p. 54).
2. «Se rappeler qu'un tableau – avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote – est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées.» in Pierre Louis [Maurice Denis], «Notes d'Art. Définition du néo-traditionnisme», *Art et critique*, 2nd year, no. 65, 23 August 1890, p. 540.
3. «Quand la plastique lutte de près avec l'écriture, dans le livre apparaissent les énormités. Je rêve d'anciens missels aux encadrements rythmiques, des lettres fastueuses de graduels, des premières gravures sur bois – qui correspondent en somme à notre complexité littéraire par des préciosités et des délicatesses. Mais l'illustration, c'est la décoration d'un livre! au lieu: 1° du placage de carrés noirs d'aspect photographique sur le blanc ou sur l'écriture; 2° de découpures naturalistes, au hasard dans le texte; 3° d'autres découpures sans aucune recherche, de pures habiletés de main, parfois (oh!) à prétexte japonais. Trouver cette décoration sans servitude du texte, sans exacte correspondance de sujet avec l'écriture; mais plutôt une broderie d'arabesques sur les pages, un accompagnement de lignes expressives.» in Pierre Louis [Maurice Denis], «Notes d'Art. Définition du néo-traditionnisme», *Art et critique*, 2nd year, no. 66, 30 August 1890, p. 557.
4. For the difficulties in getting *Sagesse* published, see Clémence Gaboriau, *Maurice Denis (1870-1943) illustrateur. Pratique d'un artiste du livre, acteurs et réseaux*, PhD thesis in art history, supervised by Professor Marianne Grivel, Sorbonne University, Paris, 2023, in particular pp. 68-77; 79-85; 170-178.
5. *La Montée au Calvaire*, November 1889, oil on canvas, 41 x 33 cm, Paris, musée d'Orsay, inv. RF 1986 68.
6. *Les Colombes*, 1894, oil on canvas, 61 x 26 cm, Hays Collection (in the process of being donated to the musée d'Orsay, Paris, with usufruct reserved).
7. *Vue d'Assise*, 1895, oil on canvas, 46 x 60 cm, priv. coll.
8. «Mes soirées sont toutes prises par les images pour *L'Imitation*», in Maurice Denis to André Gide, 11 January 1895, in Maurice Denis, André Gide, *Correspondance Maurice Denis – André Gide (1892-1945)*, eds. Pierre Masson and Carina Schäfer, Paris, Gallimard, 2006 (Les Cahiers de la NRF), no. 53, p. 112.
9. See Clémence Gaboriau, *Maurice Denis (1870-1943) illustrateur. Pratique d'un artiste du livre, acteurs et réseaux*, PhD thesis in art history, supervised by Professor Marianne Grivel, Sorbonne University, Paris, 2023, in particular pp. 153-158.
10. Maurice Denis, «LI du Livre III de *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* illustré», *Le Spectateur Catholique*, no. 4, April 1897, pp. 169-174. Reproduced as an offprint: «*Quod humilibus insistendum est operibus, cum deficitur a summis*», copperplate engraving after Maurice Denis (illustration for Book III, chapter LI de *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ*), Paris, Au «Spectateur Catholique», 1897.
11. André Mellerio, «L'illustration nouvelle», *L'Estampe et l'affiche*, 15 August 1897, no. 6, pp. 155- 159.
12. André Mellerio, «Une Illustration pour *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ*», *L'Image*, September 1897, no. 10, pp. 305-310.
13. Tony Beltrand to Maurice Denis, undated [End of 1897-Early 1898], Saint-Germain-en-Laye, musée départemental Maurice-Denis, Ms 12932.
14. «De même que *Parallèlement*, *Daphnis* n'eût, à l'époque, qu'un médiocre succès: on reprochait à ces deux ouvrages, notamment, d'être illustrés par la lithographie; le seul mode d'illustration apprécié par les bibliophiles d'alors était la gravure. Puisque les bibliophiles n'admettent que les bois, me dis-je, pourquoi ne leur donnerais-je pas des bois? Ce que je fis en éditant une *Imitation de Jésus-Christ* pour laquelle Maurice Denis fit la belle série de compositions que l'on connaît.», in Ambroise Vollard, *Souvenirs d'un marchand de tableaux*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1937, p. 307.
15. «Un livre c'est du noir sur du blanc», in Édouard Pelletan, *Deuxième lettre aux bibliophiles: du texte et du caractère typographique*, Paris, É. Pelletan, 1896, p. 13.
16. Tony Beltrand to Maurice Denis, 9 January 1899, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, musée départemental Maurice-Denis, Ms 12930.
17. Maurice Denis, *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ*, factice copy including the original drawings for the engraving, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Réserve des livres rares, D-3406.
18. Besides, Beltrand had told Denis from the start of their negotiations that it was in his "corporate interest for this book to be one of the finest books of the century". (Tony Beltrand to Maurice Denis, 9 January 1899, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, musée départemental Maurice-Denis, Ms 12930).
19. "Despite the concessions I had made to bibliophiles by abandoning lithography for woodprint, neither of these two books [*L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* et *Sagesse*] found favour with them." («Malgré les concessions que j'avais faites aux bibliophiles en abandonnant la lithographie pour le bois, aucun de ces deux livres [*L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* et *Sagesse*] ne trouva grâce devant eux.», in Ambroise Vollard, *Souvenirs d'un marchand de tableaux*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1937, p. 307).
20. «Votre *Imitation* est pour moi une joie parfaite. Elle me sera un sujet de méditation pendant des années», in Henry Cochin to Maurice Denis, undated [January 1903], Saint-Germain-en-Laye, musée départemental Maurice-Denis, Ms 2457.
21. François Chapon, *Le Peintre et le Livre: l'âge d'or du livre illustré en France (1870-1970)*, Paris, Flammarion, 1987, p. 69.

1 *De l'imitation de Jésus-Christ et du mépris de toutes les vanités du monde*
Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the first book, chapter I (p. 3)

Black ink on thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in pencil in the upper left corner *Livre I^r / Ch I*; in black ink at the top of the drawing *Qu'il faut imiter Jésus Christ / et mépriser les vanités du monde*; in pencil at the bottom right *I*

Size 169 × 145 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

For the illustration of the first chapter of *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ*, Maurice Denis introduces Christ seen from the back walking along an avenue of pillars with capitals, perhaps evoking the nave of a church. With his halo, visually transcribed by the artist with the blank light of the paper, Jesus illuminates the path and leads the faithful towards the kingdom of heaven. In this way, Denis highlights the first words of God in the book: "He who follows me does not walk in darkness". Just as the divine word exhorts the faithful to meditate on the example of Christ, this introductory illustration invites the reader to visually follow the figure of Christ, with rigor and humility, according to the precepts of *L'Imitation*, in order to "turn to the side of the invisible" and hope to obtain "the grace of God".

The artist seems to have quickly landed upon this motif for the composition, since the final woodcut faithfully reproduces the features of this single known preparatory drawing.

First Book, Chapter 1

Of the imitation of Christ, and of contempt of the world and all its vanities

1. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, saith the Lord. *These are the words of Christ; and they teach us how far we must imitate His life and character, if we seek true illumination, and deliverance from all blindness of heart. Let it be our most earnest study, therefore, to dwell upon the life of Jesus Christ.*

2. [...] *He, therefore, that will fully and with true wisdom understand the words of Christ, let him strive to conform his whole life to that mind of Christ.*

3. [...] *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, save to love God, and Him only to serve. That is the highest wisdom, to cast the world behind us, and to reach forward to the heavenly kingdom. [...]*

5. [...] *Strive, therefore, to turn away thy heart from the love of the things that are seen, and to set it upon the things that are not seen. For they who follow after their own fleshly lusts, defile the conscience, and destroy the grace of God.*

Livre I^{er}
— Ch. 1

Qu'il faut imiter Jesus Christ
et mépriser les vanités du monde



2 *Qu'il faut résister aux tentations*

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the first book, chapter XIII (p.36)

Black ink on wove thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in pencil in the upper left corner *Ch. 13*; at the top of the drawing *De la résistance aux tentations*; in the lower right corner *XIII*

Size 168 x 141 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

Ch. 13

Resistance aux tentations



3 *Qu'il faut penser à la misère des hommes*

Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration of the first book, chapter XXII

Black pencil and charcoal on wove paper, 1893-1899

Size 183 x 157 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France



4 *Du jugement et des peines des pêcheurs*

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the first book, chapter XXIV (p. 81)

Brown and black ink and pencil on wove thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in black ink and pencil in the upper left corner *ch. 24*; at the top of the drawing *Du jugement de Dieu et des peines / des pêcheurs*; on the back, in pencil *D.D livre 1 XXIV*

Size 160 x 149 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

ch. 24

Divinement de Dieu et des peines
des pêcheurs.



5 *Qu'il faut aimer Jésus-Christ plus que toutes choses*

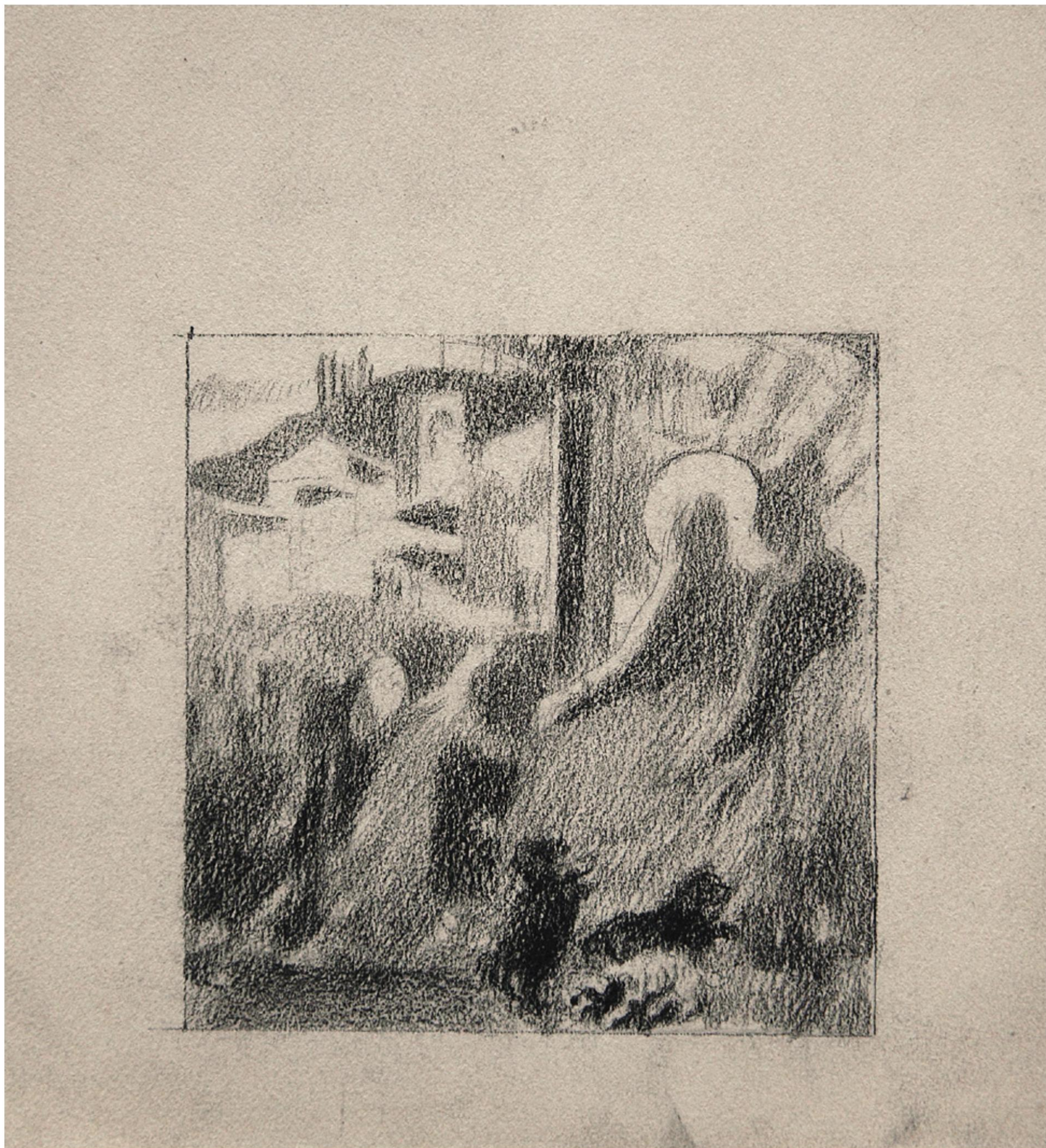
Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration of the second book, chapter VII

Black pencil and charcoal on wove paper, 1893-1899

Size 192 x 180 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

On the back, Denis executed a variation of the same subject and in the same medium, but the composition is reversed: Christ is on the left and standing. This composition should originally be the big illustration of the chapter VII of the second book ("Of loving Jesus above all things"), but Denis finally chose to only use the motif of the two dogs jumping as a cul-de-lampe on page 120.



6 *De la privation de toute consolation*

Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration of the second book, chapter IX

Black and brown ink, charcoal on thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in red pencil in the upper left corner *Ch. IX*; in pencil at the top of the drawing *De la privation de toute / consolation*; in black ink to the right of the drawing *les mains / jointes*

Size 167 x 143 mm

Exhibition *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943*, Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 29 September-18 December 1994; Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, 22 January-2 April 1995; Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, 21 April-18 June 1995; Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 7 July-17 September 1995), n° 292 (under the title *Les mains jointes*) (ill. p. 352 of the French catalogue).

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

Ch. IX

Représentation de toute
Soudation



les mains
jointes

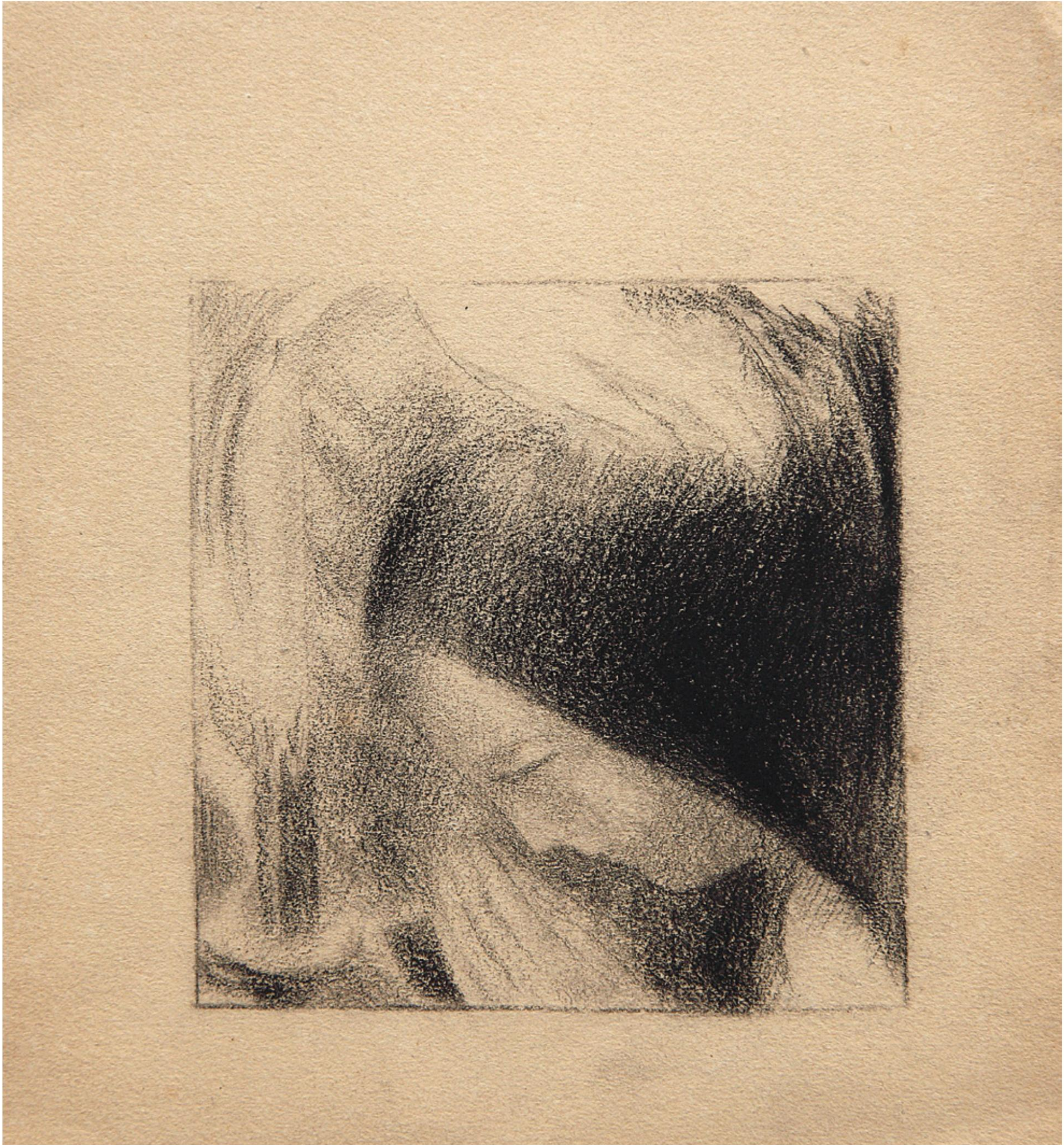
7 *De la reconnaissance due à Dieu pour ses grâces*
Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the second book, chapter X (p. 131)

Black pencil and charcoal on wove paper, 1893-1899

Size 195 x 171 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

The final picture is reversed.



8 *De la reconnaissance due à Dieu pour ses grâces*
Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration of the second book, chapter X

Black pencil and charcoal on wove paper, 1893-1899

Size 200 x 161 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

If this composition isn't used for the second book, chapter X, as originally intended, the motif of the kneeling figure with arms outstretched towards the sky is eventually printed as a cul-de-lampe for the third chapter of the first book "Of the knowledge of truth" on page 13.



9 *De la conversation intérieure de Jésus-Christ avec l'âme fidèle*

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the third book, chapter I (p. 149)

Brown ink on wove paper, ca 1893-1897

Inscribed in black ink at the top of the drawing *Les entretiens int^{rs} de J-C*; in pencil in the lower right corner *I*; on the back, in pencil *l.3.ch I o*

Size 185 x 162 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

In the chapter titled "Of the inward voice of Christ to the faithful soul", Maurice Denis presents the intimate and deeply symbolic vision of a conversation between Jesus and the believer, their heads leaning against each other in front of a dark background resembling a halo. The devotee, almost fainting, in a second state of meditation, has his eyes closed and his hand resting gently on his chest. Here, prayer, understood as a personal conversation with the Holy Spirit, allows the faithful to come as close as possible to God "when he speaks to them inwardly".

The artist had not originally chosen this subject for his illustration. He wanted to depict Christ in the familiar garden setting of the house to which his parents moved in the summer of 1897, at 5 rue de Mantes in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, as shown in a very elaborate annotated preparatory drawing (see Cat. 35). However, Maurice Denis eventually changed his mind and returned to this motif, derived from an earlier lithograph, *Tendresse ou Madeleine (deux têtes)*, published in the first album of *L'Estampe originale* in 1893. The effusion of obvious intimacy shown

by the two figures is also reminiscent of an early depiction of the budding relationship between the artist and his future wife, Marthe, then young lovers, in the painter's studio (*Encore que mes lèvres soient blondes...*, December 1890, oil on card, priv. coll.). Here again, in Denis's work, love, whether mystical or carnal, enters his visual repertoire.

Third Book, Chapter I

Of the inward voice of Christ to the faithful soul

1. I will hearken what the Lord God shall say within me.¹ Blessed is the soul which heareth the Lord speaking within it, and receiveth the word of consolation from His mouth. Blessed are the ears which receive the echoes of the soft whisper of God, and turn not aside to the whisperings of this world. Blessed truly are the ears which listen not to the voice that soundeth without, but to that which teacheth truth inwardly. Blessed are the eyes which are closed to things without, but are fixed upon things within. [...]

Think on these things, O my soul, and shut the doors of thy carnal desires, so mayest thou hear what the Lord God will say within thee. [...]

1. Psalm LXXXV. 8.

Les enluminures de J.-C.



10 *Qu'il faut cacher la grâce sous la garde de l'humilité*
Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the third book, chapter VII (p. 175)

Black ink on thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in black ink in the upper left corner *VII*; at the top of the drawing *Qu'il faut cacher humblement / les graces que Dieu nous fait*; in the lower right corner in pencil *VII*

Size 168 × 143 mm

Exhibition *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943*, Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 29 September-18 December 1994; Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, 22 January-2 April 1995; Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, 21 April-18 June 1995; Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 7 July-17 September 1995), n° 294 (ill. p. 352 of the French catalogue)

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

VII

Il faut cacher humblement
les graces que Dieu nous fait



VII

11 *Qu'il faut s'exercer à la patience et à combattre les concupiscences*

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the third book, chapter XII (p. 193)

Pencil and charcoal on card paper, 1893-1899

Size 182 x 150 mm

Exhibition *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943*, Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 29 September-18 December 1994; Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, 22 January-2 April 1995; Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, 21 April-18 June 1995; Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 7 July-17 September 1995), n° 295 (ill. p. 352 of the French catalogue).

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France



12 *Qu'il faut mettre en Dieu seul tous ses soins*

Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration of the third book, chapter XVII

Black pencil and charcoal on wove paper, 1893-1899

Size 183 x 153 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France



13 *Qu'il faut souffrir les injures; et des marques de la véritable patience*

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the third book, chapter XIX (p. 216)

Black pencil and charcoal on wove paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed on the back in pencil *A Dominique D*

Size 168 x 144 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

On the back, Denis designed a study in pencil for the illustration of the first book, chapter IX "Of obedience and subjection" used on the page 25 of the Vollard edition.



14 *Des quatre choses importantes qui donnent une paix solide*

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the third book, chapter XXIII (p. 233)

Black ink on paper, ca 1893

Inscribed in black ink in the upper left corner *ch XXIII*; in black ink at the top of the drawing *Des quatre choses importantes / pour connaître la paix*; in black ink at the bottom of the drawing *rameau d'olivier*

Size 166 × 149 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

In this preparatory drawing for the illustration of the chapter devoted to peace and its causes, Maurice Denis develops the motif of a female figure with eyes closed in meditation. Placed in front of a forest of thin tree trunks and white figures, she seems disinterested in the happenings of the outside world, the better to find herself "in the path of peace and rest" and to achieve "enlightenment of the spirit".

Although this India ink sketch is very close to the final illustration, an annotation at the bottom of the drawing indicates that the artist had apparently initially intended to include an olive branch, as a symbol of peace, in his composition. In the published illustration, perhaps to make the inner peace brought about by prayer more perceptible, Denis adds a book bearing the Latin inscription "*Pax Vobis*" ("Peace be with you") in the young woman's hands, and her hair is veiled in a nun's headdress. In addition, the angelic figures between the trees take on greater importance, and the presence of the Holy Spirit is manifested visually by a luminous halo in the canopy at the top left.

In addition to this illustration-sized drawing, there is an initial rough sketch (private collection), showing only a profile against an indistinct background, and another study in graphite (private collection), where the young woman clearly has the features of Marthe Meurier, Denis's future wife. The latter drawing was executed on the back of a sketch for an illustration

of *Le Voyage d'Urien*, confirming that this composition was designed around 1893. It is thus thought to be one of Denis's first studies for the illustration of *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ*. This motif also gave rise to a small painted sketch (not located).

Third Book, Chapter XXIII

Of four things which bring great peace

1. "My Son, now will I teach thee the way of peace and of true liberty."

2. Do, O my Lord, as Thou sayest, for this is pleasing unto me to hear.

3. "Strive, My Son, to do another's will rather than thine own. Choose always to have less rather than more. Seek always after the lowest place, and to be subject to all. Wish always and pray that the will of God be fulfilled in thee. Behold, such a man as this entereth into the inheritance of peace and quietness."

[...]

A PRAYER FOR ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE MIND

8. Enlighten me, Blessed Jesus, with the brightness of Thy inner light, and cast forth all darkness from the habitation of my heart. Restrain my many wandering thoughts, and carry away the temptations which strive to do me hurt. Fight Thou mightily for me, and drive forth the evil beasts, so call I alluring lusts, that peace may be within Thy walls and plenteousness of praise within Thy palaces,¹ even in my pure conscience. Command Thou the winds and the storms, say unto the sea, "Be still," say unto the stormy wind, "Hold thy peace," so shall there be a great calm. [...]

1. Psalm CXXII. 7.



15 *Qu'il faut renoncer à soi-même et à toute cupidité*
Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration of the third book, chapter XXXII

Black ink and pencil on thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in pencil in the lower left corner *l 1 ch XVIII o*

Size 167 x 142 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

On the back, Denis drew a study in black ink for the first book, chapter XVIII "Of the example of the holy fathers" (p. 51 of the Vollard edition). The sheet is inscribed in pencil in the upper left corner *ch 18*, in black ink at the top of the drawing *De l'exemple des Saints* and in pencil in the lower right corner *XVIII o*.



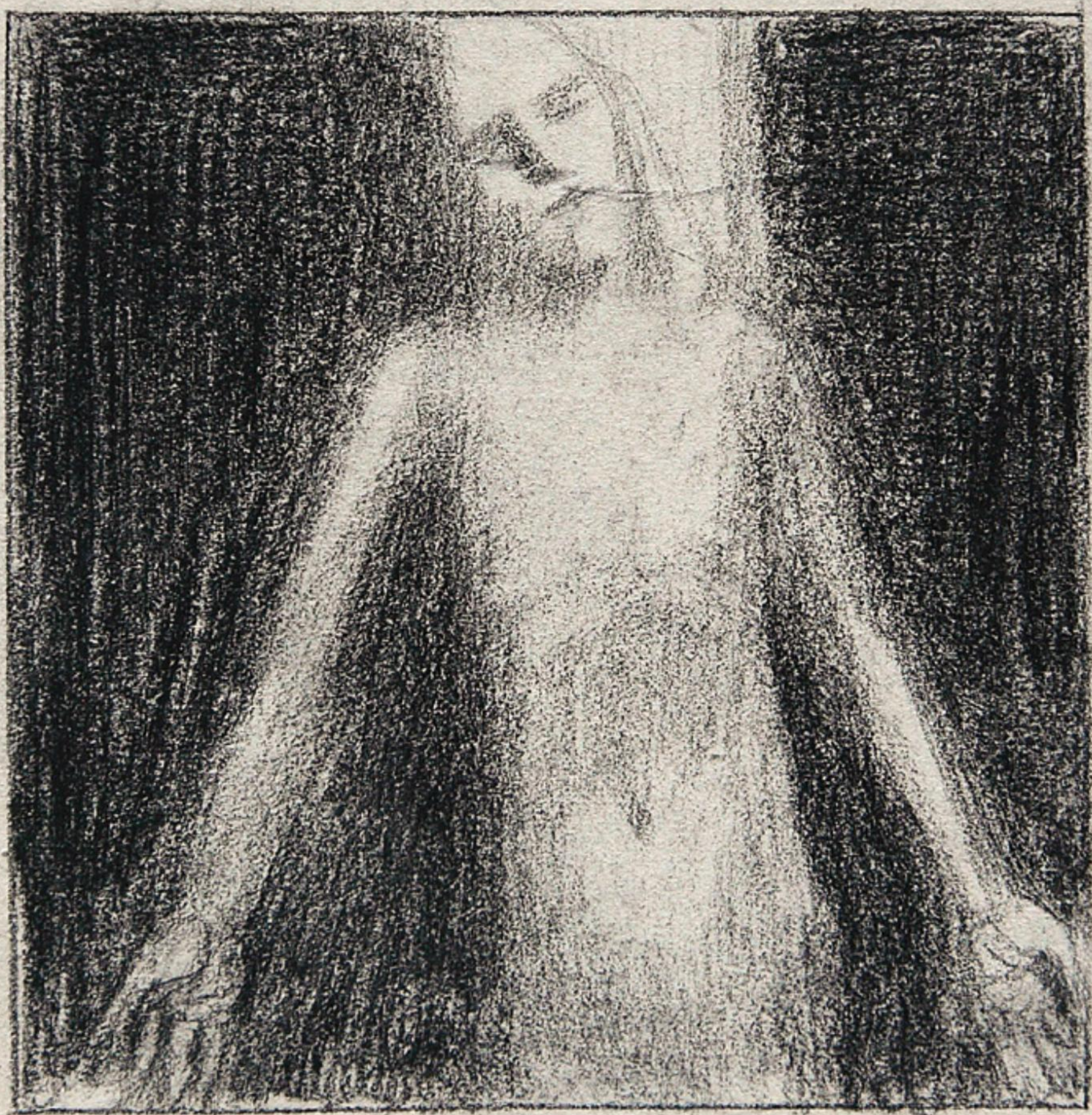
16 *Qu'il faut renoncer à soi-même et à toute cupidité*

Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration of the third book, chapter XXXII

Black pencil and charcoal on wove paper, 1893-1899

Size 182 x 171 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France



17 *Qu'il faut se donner entièrement à Dieu pour obtenir la liberté du cœur*

Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration of the third book, chapter XXXVII

Black pencil and charcoal on wove paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in pencil at the top of the drawing *Qu'il faut renoncer entièrement à soi / même pour obtenir la liberté du cœur*; on the back, in pencil in the lower left corner *DD, l 3, ch XXXVII o*

Size 161 × 143 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

Qu'il faut renoncer entièrement à soi
même pour obtenir la liberté du cœur



18 *Du jour de l'éternité et des misères de cette vie*

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the third book, chapter XLVIII (p. 313)

Brown and black ink on wove thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in black ink in the upper left corner *XLVIII*; at the top of the drawing *De l'éternité bienheureuse et des / misères de cette vie*; in pencil in the lower right corner *XLVIII*

Size 165 × 143 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

XLVIII

O. l'eternité bienheureuse et des
misères de cette vie.



XLVIII

19 *Que la grâce de Dieu ne se trouve point dans ceux qui ont du goût pour les choses de la terre*

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the third book, chapter LIII (p.336)

Brown and black ink on wove thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in black ink in the upper left corner *Ch. LIII*; in black ink at the top of the drawing *Que la Grâce ne fructifie pas en / ceux qui ont le goût des choses / de la terre*; in pencil in the lower right corner *LIII*; on the back, in pencil *L3 ch. LIII o*

Size 170 × 145 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

Ch. LIII

Quelle grande ne s'écrit pas en
cette espèce de gout d'herbe, de
la F.H.



LIII

20 *Qu'il ne faut pas vouloir approfondir les choses d'en haut et les secrets jugements de Dieu*

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the third book, chapter LVIII (p. 357)

Black ink on thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in black ink in the upper left corner *LVIII*; in black ink on the top of the drawing *Qu'on ne doit pas chercher à pénétrer / ce qui est au dessus de nous*; in pencil in the lower right corner *LVII*; on the back in pencil *l.3 ch. LVIII o*

Size 158 × 154 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

This sketch for the illustration of Book 3, chapter LVIII of *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* depicts small figures walking along a road, which winds and tapers through tall trees into a deep background. The path is bordered on either side by a high wall, forming an enclosed space in the landscape that protects the figures from the outside world as much as it guides them along a single way, towards a horizon where sky and earth intermingle.

The subject of a path running through the trees, a recurring motif in Maurice Denis's work, symbolises the course of life, and particularly the soul's ascent to God. Here, figures in search of their destiny must "humiliate themselves willingly with the little ones" and walk with God throughout their lives if they hope to reach the kingdom of heaven.

The musée départemental Maurice-Denis in Saint-Germain-en-Laye holds a painting with the same motif (inv. PMD 976.1.53).

Third Book, Chapter LVIII

Of deeper matters, and God's hidden judgments which are not to be inquired into

[...]

3. "Some are drawn by zeal of love to greater affection to these Saints or those; but this is human affection rather than divine. I am He Who made all the Saints: I gave them grace, I brought them glory; I know the merits of every one; I prevented them with the blessings of My goodness.¹ I foreknew my beloved ones from everlasting, I chose them out of the world;² they did not choose Me. I called them by My grace, drew them by My mercy, led them on through sundry temptations. I poured mighty consolations upon them, I gave them perseverance, I crowned their patience.

[...]

7. "Take heed, therefore, My son, that thou treat not curiously those things which surpass thy knowledge, but

rather make this thy business and give attention to it, namely, that thou seek to be found, even though it be the least, in the Kingdom of God. And even if any one should know who were holier than others, or who were held greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven; what should that knowledge profit him, unless through this knowledge he should humble himself before Me, and should rise up to give greater praise unto My name? He who considereth how great are his own sins, how small his virtues, and how far he is removed from the perfection of the Saints, doeth far more acceptably in the sight of God, than he who disputeth about their greatness or littleness.

[...]

9. "Many ask who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, who know not whether they shall be worthy to be counted among the least. It is a great thing to be even the least in Heaven, where all are great, because all shall be called, and shall be, the sons of God. A little one shall become a thousand, but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. For when the disciples asked who should be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, they received no other answer than this, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. But whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same shall be greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."³

10. Woe unto them who disdain to humble themselves willingly with the little children; for the low gate of the kingdom of Heaven will not suffer them to enter in. Woe also to them who are rich, who have their consolation here;⁴ because whilst the poor enter into the kingdom of God, they shall stand lamenting without. Rejoice ye humble, and exult ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God if only ye walk in the truth

1. Psalm XXI. 3.

2. John XV. 19.

3. Matthew XVIII. 3.

4. Luke vi. 24.

LVIII

Qu'on ne doit pas chercher à pénétrer
ce qui est au dessous de nous.



LVIII

- 21 *Que nous devons nous offrir à Dieu avec tout ce qui est à nous et prier pour tous*
Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the fourth book, chapter IX (p. 408)

Black pencil and charcoal on wove paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in pencil at the top of the drawing *Que nous devons nous offrir à / Dieu et prier pour tous*

Size 178 x 150 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

Que nous devons nous offrir à
Dieu et prier pour tous.



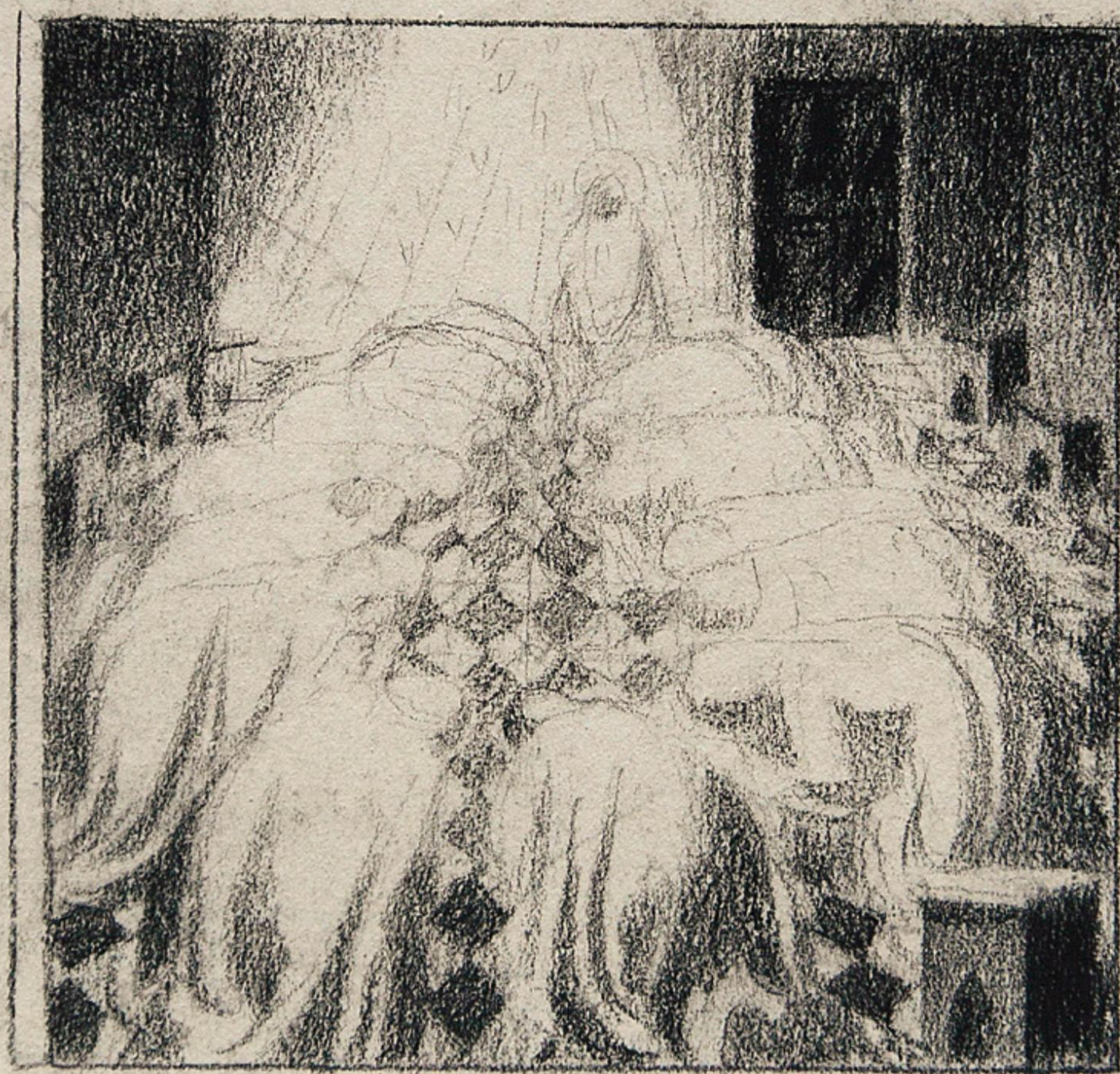
22 *Que nous devons nous offrir à Dieu avec tout ce qui est à nous et prier pour tous*

Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration of the fourth book, chapter IX

Pencil and charcoal on card paper, 1893-1899

Size 174 x 150 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France



23 *Que celui qui doit recevoir Jésus-Christ est obligé de se préparer avec un grand soin*
Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the fourth book, chapter XII (p. 423)

Black ink on thin paper, ca 1895

Inscribed in black ink at the top of the drawing *Qu'on doit se préparer avec / grand soin à la Communion*; in pencil in the lower right corner *XII*; on the back in pencil on the lower left corner *l 4 ch. XII o*

Size 181 × 144 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

In this preparatory drawing for the illustration of the chapter "That he who is about to Communicate with Christ ought to prepare himself with great diligence" (Book IV, chap. XII), Maurice Denis revisits the theme of the Resurrection. This subject, so dear to the artist, reappears frequently in his œuvre, especially in the years 1894-1895.

It is therefore not surprising that the motif of this illustration is taken from a pre-existing composition, executed in 1895, of which Maurice Denis proposed a variation in square format (*Noli me tangere*, stained glass project, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, musée départemental Maurice-Denis, inv. PMD 976.1.109). The encounter between Mary Magdalene and Christ, based on the painting *Matinée de Pâques* (1894, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, musée départemental Maurice-Denis, inv. PMD 976.1.107), is set in a garden around a flowering shrub, symbolizing the nature's renewal in spring. Above them, a banner echoes Jesus's words "*Noli me tangere*" ("Do not touch me") as recorded in the Gospel (John 20:17). The scene is divided into two registers: the upper part of the composition shows the divine apparition; while the lower part is animated by holy women – or nuns – dressed in characteristic black and devoutly witnessing the miracle.

In the drawing, the luminous halo surrounding Christ and illuminating the right-hand side of the composition is depicted with a network of fine lines emanating from the figure. This strong sense of light, which counterbalances a preponderance of ornamental motifs on the left side of the work, gives the scene an unreal quality and emphasises the image's spiritual content.

For this illustration, the artist initially thought to depict a mystical fountain with drinking doves, as can be seen from a note on another preparatory drawing for *L'Imitation* (private collection); this latter motif was ultimately used for another chapter of the book dedicated to the Eucharist, "That many good gifts are bestowed upon those who Communicate devoutly" (Book IV, chap. IV, p. 390).

Fourth Book, Chapter XII

That he who is about to Communicate with Christ ought to prepare himself with great diligence
 [...]

2. [...] But out of My tenderness and grace alone art thou permitted to draw nigh unto My table; as though a beggar were called to a rich man's dinner, and had no other recompense to offer him for the benefits done unto him, but to humble himself and to give him thanks. Do therefore as much as lieth in thee, and do it diligently, not of custom, nor of necessity, but with fear, reverence, and affection, receive the Body of thy beloved Lord God, who vouchsafeth to come unto thee. I am He who hath called thee; I commanded it to be done; I will supply what is lacking to thee; come and receive Me.

3. [...] Nor dost thou come to sanctify Me, but I come to sanctify thee and make thee better. Thou comest that thou mayest be sanctified by Me, and be united to Me; that thou mayest receive fresh grace, and be kindled anew to amendment of life. See that thou neglect not this grace, but prepare thy heart with all diligence, and receive thy Beloved unto thee.

4. [...] I am He to whom thou oughtest wholly to give thyself; so that now thou mayest live not wholly in thyself, but in Me, free from all anxiety.

Un oncle a préparé avec
grand soin la Communion



24 *Que l'âme dévote doit désirer de tout son cœur de s'unir à Jésus-Christ dans le sacrement*

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the fourth book, chapter XIII (p. 427)

Pencil on wove paper, ca 1897

Inscribed in pencil at the top of the drawing *du désir ardent de recevoir J.C.*; in pencil in the lower right corner *XIII*; on the back, in pencil at the bottom *l. 4 ch. XIII o*

Size 130 × 105 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

This brief sketch for the illustration designed to accompany the chapter on the “ardent desire to receive J[esus]-C[hrist]” already demonstrates a full conception of the ultimate composition. Within a narrow frame, two figures are depicted in profile. The one on the left, surrounded by a halo, kisses with the tip of her lips the forehead of a communicant to the right, who leans forward on a prie-dieu. The luminous halo emanating from the divine figure radiates over the rest of the composition through small touches of pencil, enlivening this otherwise spare image. This symbolic kiss conveys the mystical atmosphere of the faithful's union with Christ and their enlightenment through prayer and devotion.

This spiritual image had a particular resonance for the artist, who associated it with an episode in his personal life. Shortly before the publication of *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* in 1899, Maurice Denis had produced a series of lithographs, *Amour*, devoted entirely to his love for his wife, Marthe. Drawing on intimate notes from his diary of 1891-1893, the artist poetically depicts various high points of their romantic life, including their first kiss. A work from that series, *Ce fut un religieux mystère* (*It was a religious mystery*), features a composition similar to that of the present illustration. The print studies God's deep love as a powerful bond between the future spouses, who felt “filled with the presence of God” and exchanged the kiss that sealed their love and united them “forever” (Maurice Denis, *Journal* (1884-

1904), t. I, Paris, La Colombe, 1957, p. 88). As such, the carnal outpouring resonates with the divine mystery.

Fourth Book, Chapter XIII

That the devout soul ought with the whole heart to yearn after union with Christ in the Sacrament

[...]

1. *Who shall grant unto me, O Lord, that I may find Thee alone, and open all my heart unto Thee, and enjoy Thee as much as my soul desireth; and that no man may henceforth look upon me, nor any creature move me or have respect unto me, but Thou alone speak unto me and I unto Thee, even as beloved is wont to speak unto beloved, and friend to feast with friend? For this do I pray, this do I long for, that I may be wholly united unto Thee, and may withdraw my heart from all created things, and by means of Holy Communion and frequent celebration may learn more and more to relish heavenly and eternal things. Ah, Lord God, when shall I be entirely united and lost in Thee, and altogether forgetful of myself? Thou in me, and I in Thee;¹ even so grant that we may in like manner continue together in one.*

[...]

3. [...] *There is nothing which I am able to present more acceptable than to give my heart altogether unto God, and to join it inwardly to Him. Then all my inward parts shall rejoice, when my soul shall be perfectly united unto God. Then shall He say unto me, “If thou wilt be with Me, I will be with thee.” And I will answer Him, “Vouchsafe, O Lord, to abide with me, I will gladly be with Thee; this is my whole desire, even that my heart be united unto Thee.”*

1. John xv. 4



25 *Qu'on obtient la grâce de la dévotion par l'humilité et en renonçant à soi-même*
Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration of the fourth book, chapter XV

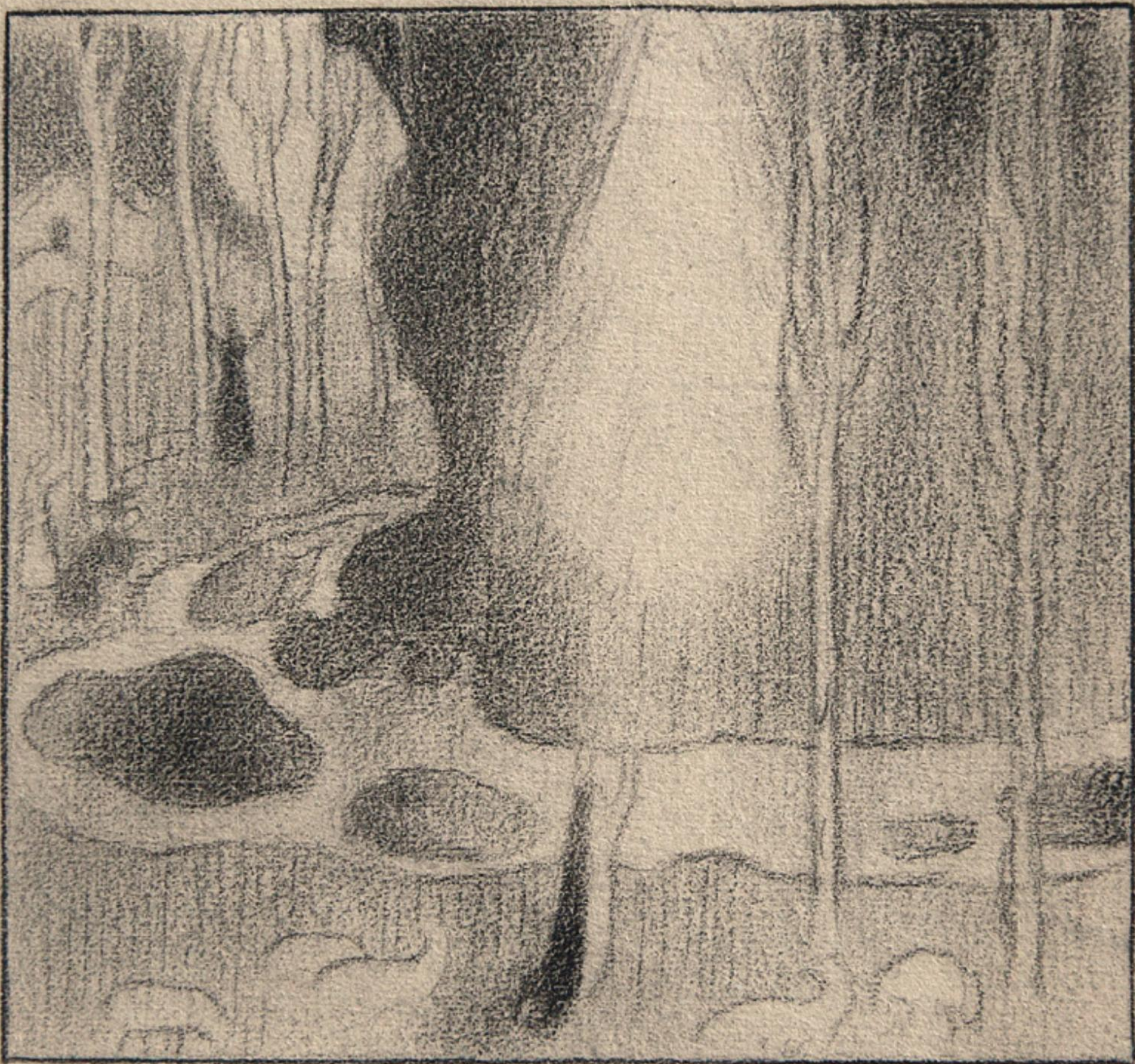
Pencil and charcoal on card paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in pencil at the top of the drawing *De la*

Size 176 x 158 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

De la



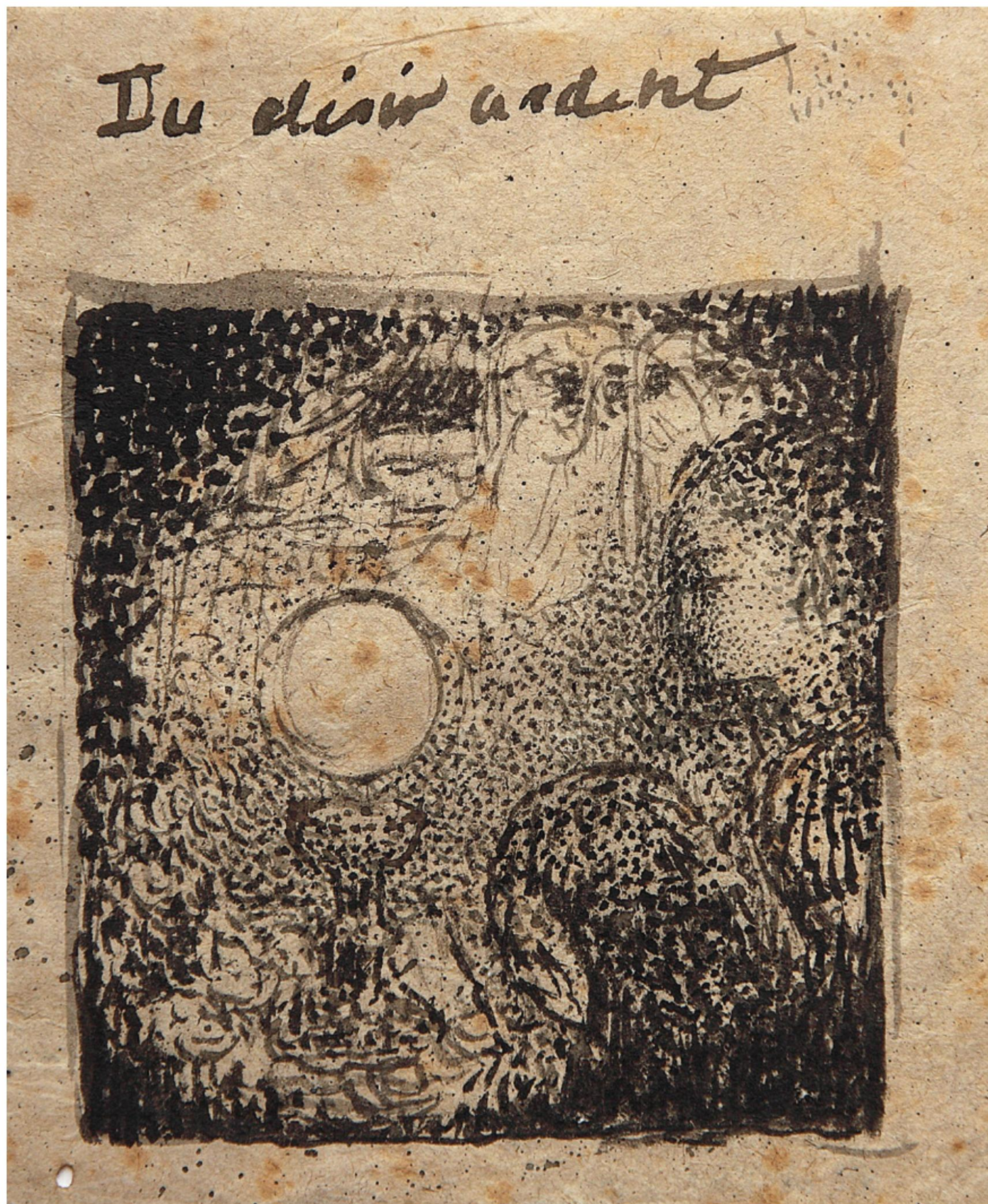
26 *Avec quel ardent amour et quelle ferveur on doit recevoir Jésus-Christ*
Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the fourth book, chapter XVII (p. 439)

Black ink on wove thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in black ink at the top of the drawing *Du désir ardent*

Size 163 × 138 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France



EIGHTEEN ADDITIONAL DRAWINGS

27



Qu'il faut prendre garde à ne point trop parler

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the first book, chapter X (p. 27)

Pencil and brown ink on thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in pencil in the upper left corner *ch 10*; in brown ink, at the top of the drawing *qu'il faut éviter les entretiens / inutiles*

Size 158 x 148 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

28



Comment on peut acquies la paix et s'avancer dans le chemin de la vertu

Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration of the first book, chapter XI

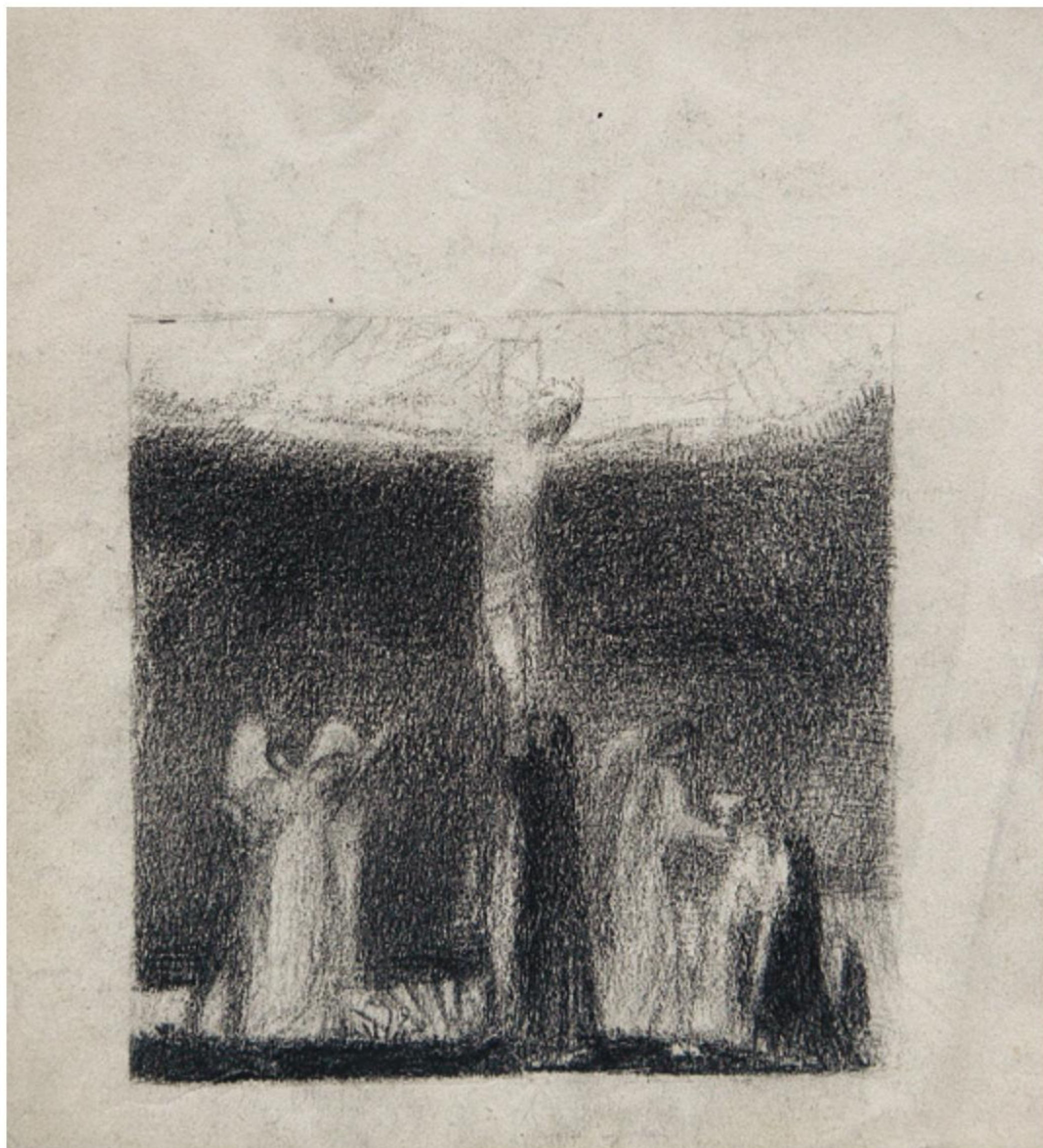
Pencil and black ink on thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in pencil in the upper left corner *ch. II*; in pencil at the top of the drawing *Des moyens d'acquies la paix / intérieure*

Size 167 x 143 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

29



Que les adversités sont utiles

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the first book, chapter XII (p. 34)

Charcoal and pencil on wove paper, 1893-1899

Size 178 x 168 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

30



Qu'il faut penser à la misère des hommes

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the first book, chapter XXII (p. 70)

Black ink on wove paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in black ink at the top of the drawing *De la considération des misères humaines*; in pencil in the lower right corner *XXII*

Size 167 x 145 mm

Exhibition *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943*, Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 29 September-18 December 1994; Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, 22 January-2 April 1995; Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, 21 April-18 June 1995; Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, 7 July-17 September 1995), n° 290) (ill. p.352 of the French catalogue).

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

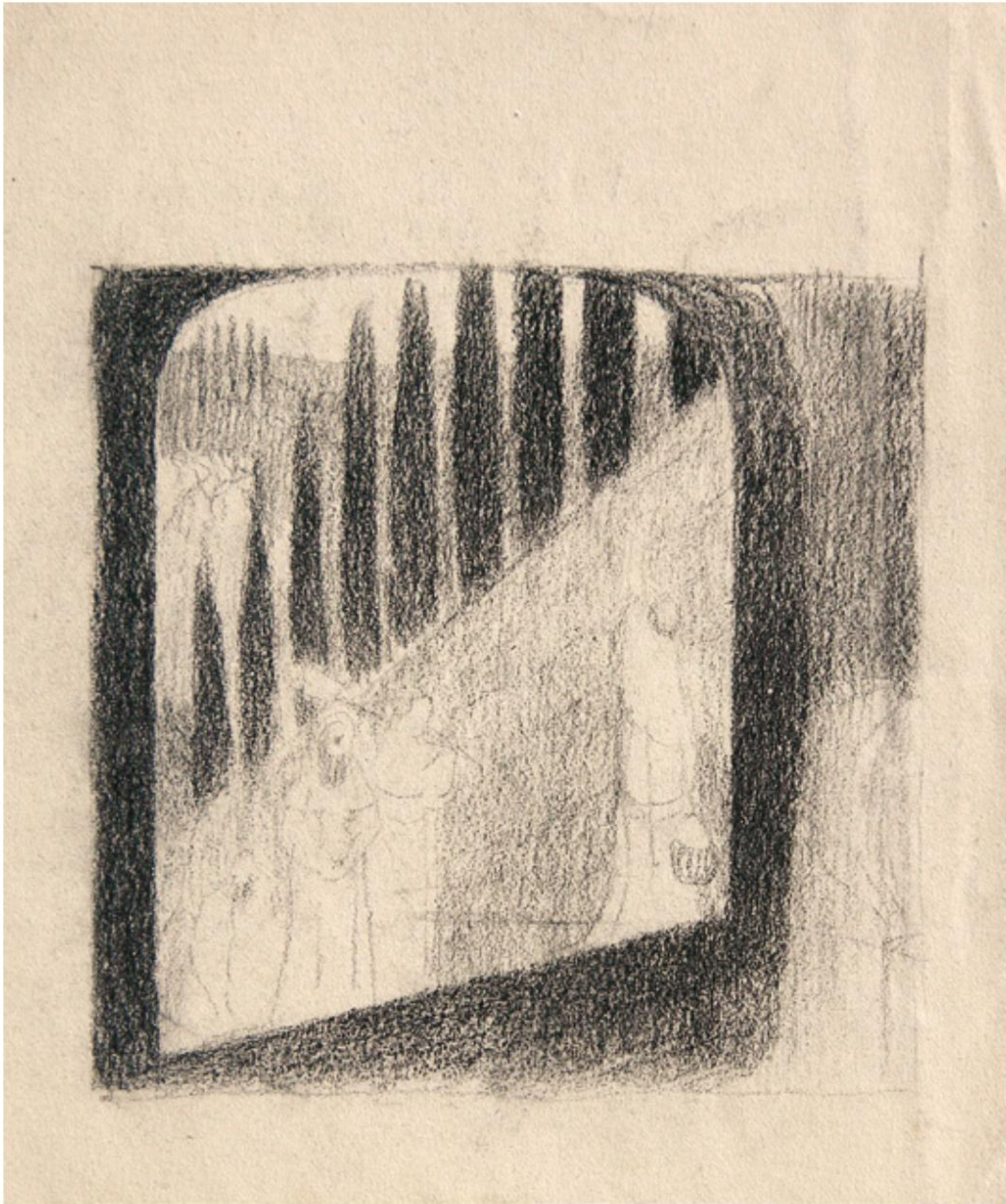
31



Qu'il faut désirer ardemment de se corriger
Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration
of the first book, chapter XXV

Pencil and charcoal on paper, 1893-1899
Size 178 x 164 mm
Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye;
his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-
en-Laye; thence by descent, France

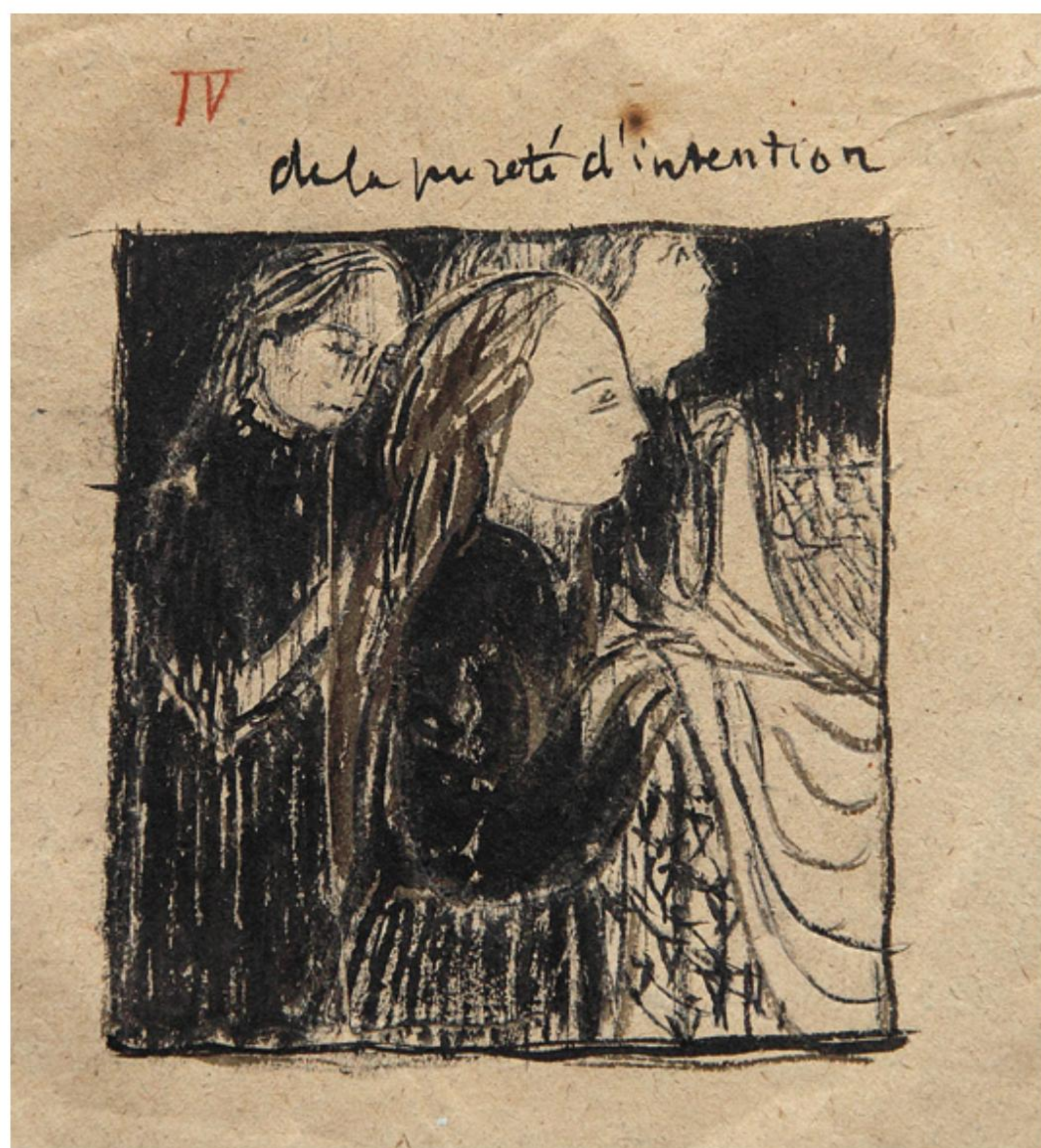
32



Qu'il faut désirer ardemment de se corriger
Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration
of the first book, chapter XXV

Pencil and charcoal on paper, 1893-1899
Size 167 x 147 mm
Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye;
his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-
en-Laye; thence by descent, France

33



De la pureté du cœur et de la simplicité d'intention

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the second book, chapter IV (p. 108)

Pencil, brown and black ink on thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in red pencil in the upper left corner *IV*; in black ink at the top of the drawing *de la pureté d'intention*; on the back in pencil *DD Liv. II CH IV*

Size 154 × 139 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

On the back, Denis executed a rough sketch of the same subject in black ink, but the composition is reversed: the figures are arranged from the right to the left.

34



Du chemin royal de la Sainte Croix

Preparatory drawing for the illustration of the second book, chapter XII (p. 139)

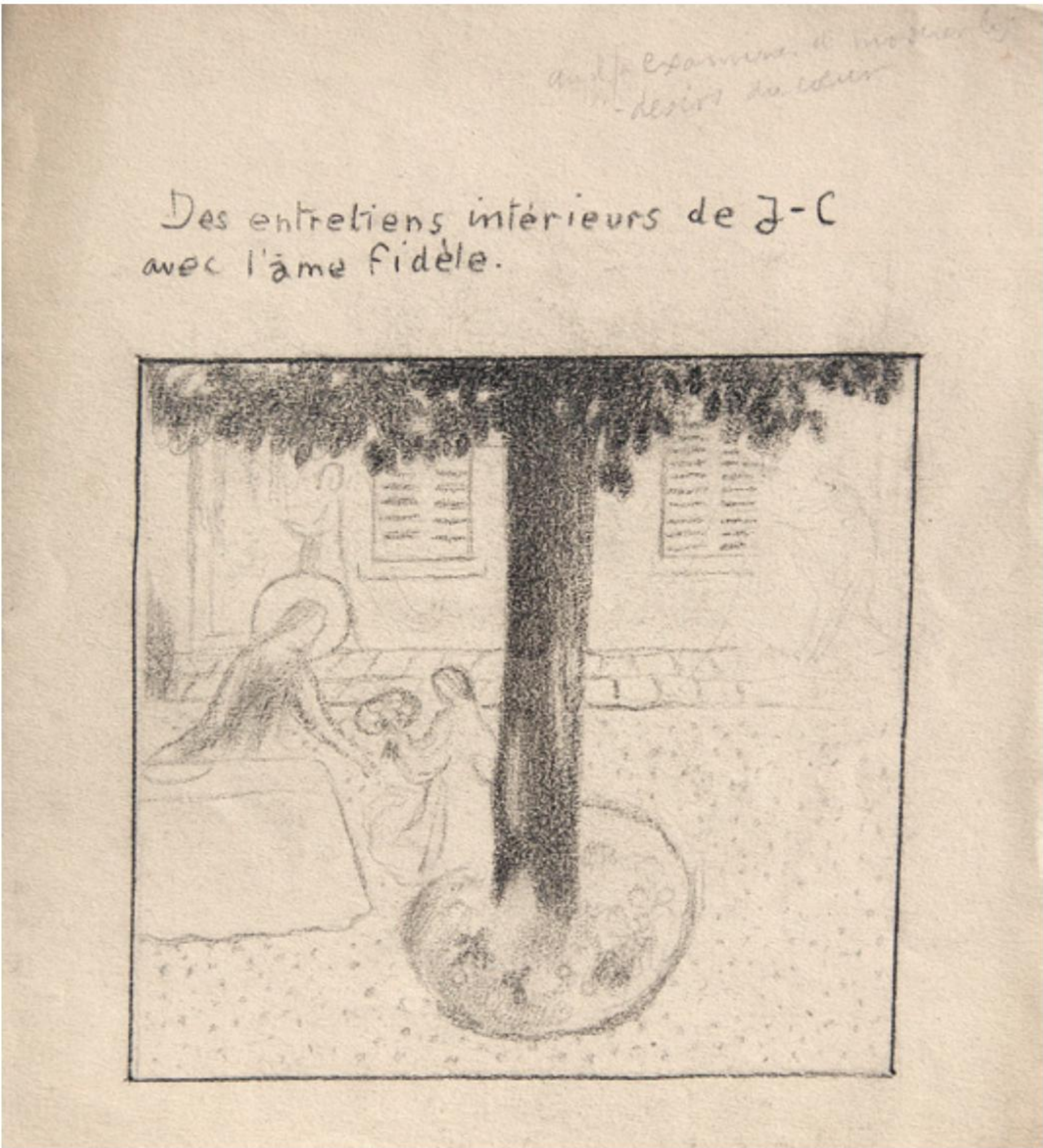
Black ink on thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in red pencil in the upper left corner *ch. XII*; in black ink at the top of the drawing *De la voie royale de la / Croix*; in pencil in the lower right corner *XII*; on the back in pencil in the lower left corner *l. 2, Ch. XII o*

Size 166 × 138 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-en-Laye; thence by descent, France

35

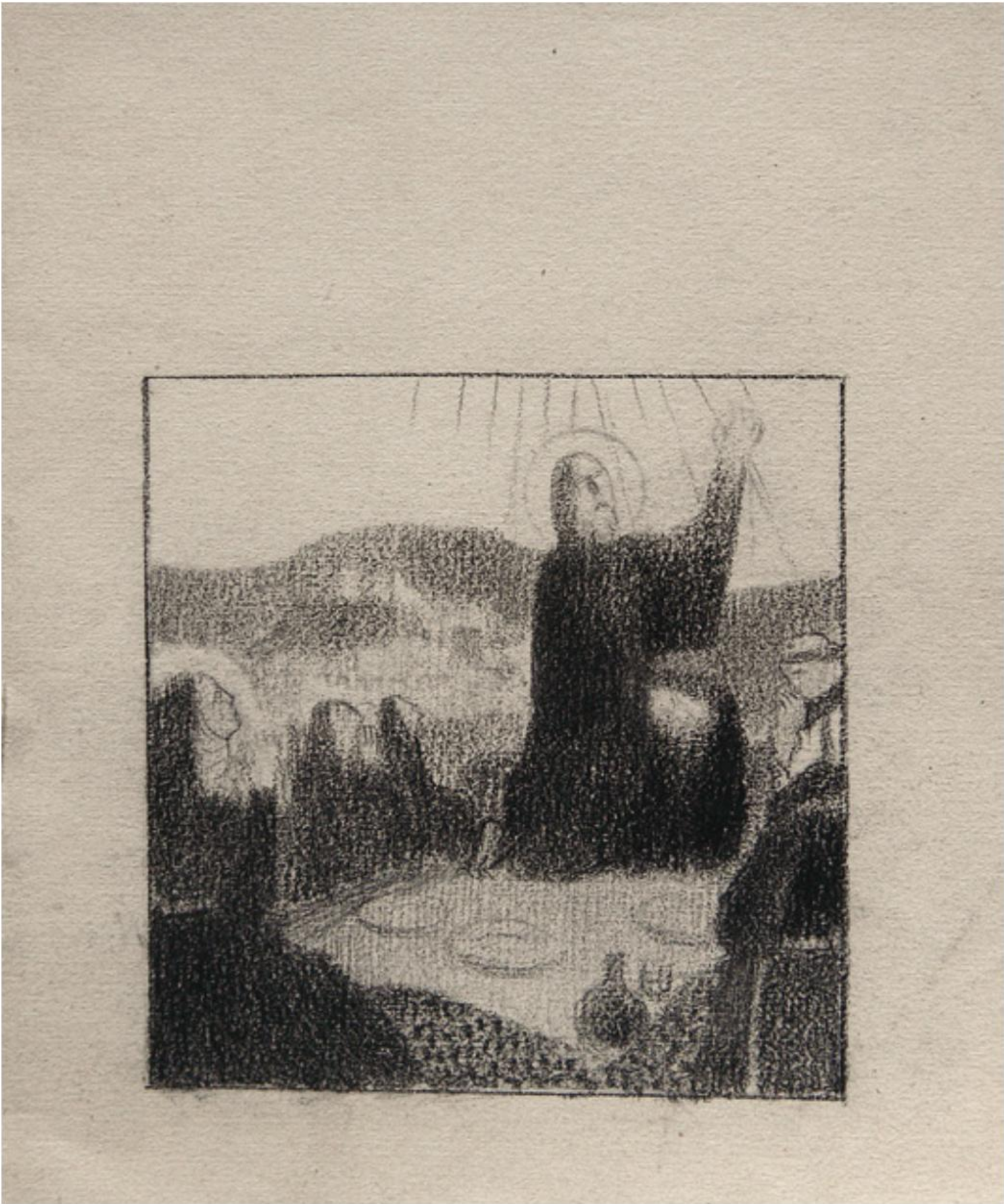


*De la conversation intérieure
de Jésus-Christ avec l'âme fidèle*

**Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration
of the third book, chapter I**

Pencil and charcoal on paper, ca 1897-1899
Inscribed in pencil in the upper right corner *qu'il fa. examiner
et modérer / les désirs du cœur*; in charcoal at the top of the
drawing *Des entretiens intérieurs de J-C / avec l'âme fidèle*
Size 189 x 170 mm
Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye;
his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-
en-Laye; thence by descent, France

36



*Que la vérité nous parle intérieurement
sans vain bruit de paroles*

**Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration
of the third book, chapter II**

Pencil and black chalk on card paper, 1893-1899
Size 165 x 140 mm
Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye;
his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-
en-Laye; thence by descent, France

37



*De l'obéissance d'un serviteur humble
suivant l'exemple de Jésus-Christ*

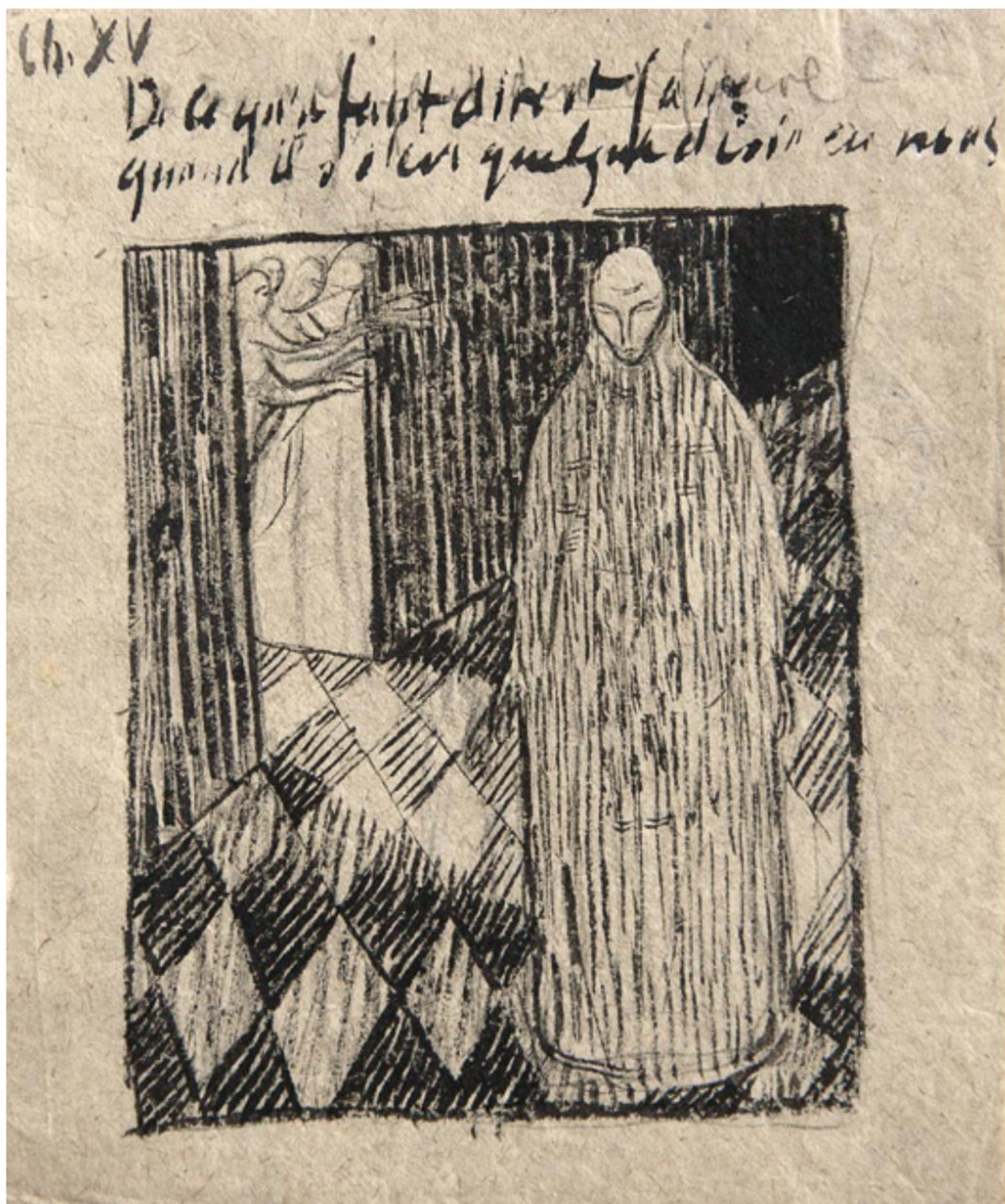
**Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration
of the third book, chapter XIII**

Pencil, brown and black wash heightened with white chalk,
1893-1899

Size 161 x 165 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye;
his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-
en-Laye; thence by descent, France

38



*De quelle manière on doit se comporter,
et ce qu'on doit dire au sujet de toutes
les choses désirables*

**Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration
of the third book, chapter XV**

Black ink on thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in black ink in the upper left corner *Ch. XV*;
in pencil and black ink at the top of the drawing *De ce qu'il
faut dire et faire / quand il s'élève quelque désir en nous*

Size 166 x 143 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye;
his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-
en-Laye; thence by descent, France

On the back of the sheet, Denis drew a rough sketch in
pencil of a woman's silhouette for *La Dame au jardin clos*,
which is his wife, Marthe's, first nude, painted in 1894
(Paris, musée d'Orsay, inv. RF 2012 10).

39



*Qu'il faut renoncer à soi-même
et à toute cupidité*

**Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration
of the third book, chapter XXXII**

Ink wash, charcoal and pencil on blueish wove paper, 1893-1899
Inscribed in pencil at the top of the drawing *De l'abnegation
de soi même*

Size 182 x 158 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye;
his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-
en-Laye; thence by descent, France

The reverse shows a pencil sketch for the illustration
of chapter LIX of the third book "That we must put our
hope and all our trust in God alone". This small calvary
overlooking the sea was also depicted in an oil on canvas
painted around 1897 (priv. coll.).

40



Du mépris de tous les honneurs temporels

**Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration
of the third book, chapter XLI**

Pencil and black ink on thin paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in black ink in the upper left corner *XLI*; in pencil
and black ink at the top of the drawing *Du mépris de tous les
honneurs / du temps*; on the back, a pencil scheme

Size 165 x 140 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye;
his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-
en-Laye; thence by descent, France

41



*Qu'il ne faut pas attendre sa paix
des hommes*

**Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration
of the third book, chapter XLII**

Charcoal and pencil on wove paper, 1893-1899

Size 170 x 161 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye;
his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-
en-Laye; thence by descent, France

On the back, Denis sketched three preparatory
drawing of the same sujet: a Christ with child, which
is eventually used for the illustration for the third book,
chapter XXIV, "Of avoiding of curious inquiry into
the life of another" (p.237 of the Vollard edition).

42



*Qu'il ne faut pas attendre sa paix
des hommes*

**Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration
of the third book, chapter XLII**

Pencil and charcoal on paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in pencil at the top of the drawing *Qu'il ne faut pas
que notre paix*

Size 201 x 151 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye;
his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-
en-Laye; thence by descent, France



*Que nous devons nous offrir à Dieu
avec tout ce qui est à nous et prier
pour tous*

**Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration
of the fourth book, chapter IX**

Charcoal and pencil on wove paper, 1893-1899

Size 178 x 154 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye;
his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-
en-Laye; thence by descent, France



*Que l'homme ne doit point vouloir,
par curiosité, approfondir le sacrement,
mais imiter humblement Jésus-Christ
en soumettant ses sens à la foi*

**Alternative preparatory drawing for the illustration
of the fourth book, chapter XVIII**

Pencil and black chalk on card paper, 1893-1899

Inscribed in black ink at the top of the drawing *Qu'on ne doit
pas chercher à pénétrer / l'arbre de la foi / le mouton. la signature
du peintre*; in pencil at the top of the drawing *mais pas celui
qui est fait*

Size 172 x 156 mm

Provenance The artist's studio, Saint-Germain-en-Laye;
his son, Dominique Denis, Saint-Germain-
en-Laye; thence by descent, France

On the back, a handwritten list serves Denis as an aide-memoire for his illustration work: it lists the titles of around twenty chapters, to which are sometimes added a few iconographic elements ("Procession", "Burning Bush", "Pigeons", etc.). Each line corresponding to a completed illustration is preceded by a cross.

Essay and Entries
Clémence Gaboriau

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Scans & Photographs
Catalogue raisonné Maurice Denis / Olivier Goulet

Special thanks to (by alphabetical order) L'arbre à cadres, Claire Denis, Clémence Gaboriau & Fabienne Stahl.

HR Pictures of the additional drawings can be sent on request.

The English translation of *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* is by William Benham (1831-1910) and taken from the Online Gutenberg Project.

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